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ABSTRACT

Forty special education majors (graduate and undergraduate) completed a survey on perceptions of problems and needs in educating minority handicapped children. Perceptions were assessed via 32 items in four major areas: sociocultural factors, identification and evaluation, instruction, and future opportunities. Findings were reported according to agreement/disagreement on each item as well as on discrepancy between corresponding items on the survey form. Socioeconomic discrepancies were revealed in the perceived impact of socioeconomic variables on handicapping conditions and variables on handicapping conditions and existing social/economic status of minority families as compared to whites. Identification/evaluation discrepancies included the need to use standardized tests and the appropriateness of present tests for black children; the influence of the examiner/assessment techniques on performance and the appropriateness of present examiner qualities/testing techniques for black children; and different levels of performance on criterion measures for placement and the suitability of present placement criteria for black children. Among instructional discrepancies indicated were the influence of individualized instruction and the suitability of instruction for blacks; the influence of teacher training on students' success and the qualifications of teachers/quality of teaching for blacks; and the influence of teaching strategies/resources on learning. The futuristic discrepancy revealed by survey responses was between the influence of society's commitment to the further education/employment of the handicapped and the future of minority handicapped children for productive living. In each discrepancy, lower scores were reported for the status of societal/special education services for the minority handicapped item than for its companion item. (CL)

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Assessing Problems and Needs in Educating Minority Handicapped Children

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Assessing Problems and Needs in Educating Minority Handicapped Children

The American education system is charged with the responsibility of educating all handicapped children. Public Law 94-142 mandates that all handicapped children must be provided a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. In meeting this charge special educators are challenged to address the needs of minority children who are both exceptional and from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds (Baca, 1980).

What special provisions, beyond those which are to be accorded all handicapped children, if any, are needed to assure that minority handicapped children receive an appropriate education in the schools? Very little research was found to provide a definitive reply to the question and existing information tended to address general concerns of minorities as groups with little attention given to the minority handicapped.

Through a survey of related literature, "notions" on the problems and needs of minority handicapped children were extracted and grouped into three general areas of concern: (a) sociocultural variables, (b) educational assessment, and (c) teaching practices. Information gathered in these areas served as a basis for further investigation of educational problems and needs of minority handicapped children.

Two basic points may be very worthy of note as discourse takes place in discussing minority handicapped children. First,

diversity exists both among and within minority groups due to regional, cultural, linguistic, and other types of differences (Sattler, 1982; and Baca, 1980). Second, minority handicapped children may not require unusual special education but valid professional practice to include communication sensitive to various cultural patterns and diagnosis that reflects culturally unique meaning of information which is collected (Hilliard, 1980).

The literature tends to indicate that the sociocultural status of minority groups presents concerns for handicapped individuals within the groups. Findings of a negative nature associated with persons from diverse cultures suggest (a) that crowded conditions in the home restrict privacy, inhibit play fantasy, decision making, and sound study habits, (b) lack of sensitivity to their culture by the dominant group, (c) limited cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development, (d) over-representation in special education classes, (e) feelings of futility, alienation, a sense of failure and rejection, and (f) lowered performance on achievement tests and less probability of completing high school (Mandell and Fiscus, 1982: Hilliard, 1980; and Ysseldyke and Algozzine, 1982). While research on different minority groups indicates cross-cultural validity, for example, Puerto Rican children from poor families face many of the same problems as black children from poor families, a minority culture may be viewed as complete and stimulating, not deprived (Mandell and Fiscus, 1981).

Problems have been associated with the educational assessment of minority handicapped children for some time. Public Law 94-142 included a major provision on nondiscriminatory testing and evaluation (Harvey, 1978), the court case Larry P. vs. Riles prohibited the placement of Blacks in MR classes on the basis of IQ tests as they were then administered (Davis, 1981), and some states (Mississippi for example) require multifactored assessment for placement in special education. Factors on the list of concerns in the assessment of minority handicapped children are (a) labelling (b) use of appropriate tests, (c) conditions under which tests are given, and (d) lowered IQ scores as compared with whites (Swanson and Watson, 1982; and Ysseldyke and Algozzine, 1982). Presently used standardized tests tend to (a) reflect middle class experiences, (b) penalize the linguistically diverse, (c) disregard the cognitive styles of minorities, (d) be administered in an inappropriate atmosphere, and (e) be scored based on middle class standardization groups (Bailey and Harbin, 1980).

Given as impeding factors to the instruction of minority handicapped children are (a) little parental concern and involvement, (b) poor students' self-concept, (c) inattention to learning styles, (d) negative teacher attitudes and lowered expectations, (e) irrelevancy of the curriculum and materials, and (f) unsuitable instructional strategies and techniques (Almanza and Mosley, 1980; Ysseldyke and Algozzine, 1982; and Mandell and Fiscus, 1981). It is recommended that acceptance of pluralistic societal factors become the goal of the classroom teacher and that the acceptance be exemplified through (a) individualized instruction, (b)

alertness to student needs and wishes, (c) association of background with instruction, and (d) the imparting of knowledge beyond traditional subject areas (Mandell and Fiscus, 1981).

Some problems and needs of minority handicapped children have been presented under the headings (a) sociocultural factors, (b) educational assessment, and (c) instruction. But in many cases the sources and methods for arriving at information on the problems were not clearly stated. To initiate an intervention program to impact on appropriate education for minority handicapped children, assessment of special educators' perceptions of problems and needs of minority handicapped children appeared to be a logical beginning. After all, as Mandell and Fiscus (1981) pointed out, special education teachers are expected to provide quality training as exemplified through bicultural awareness, curriculum modification, alternative assessment procedures, and classroom dynamics for improving educational programs for bicultural children. An assessment of teachers' perceptions of and attitudes toward the problems and needs of minority handicapped children would also have definite implications for preservice and in-service training.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper was to assess special educators' perceptions of the problems and needs in educating minority handicapped children. Perceptions were assessed in four major areas of concern (a) sociocultural factors, (b) identification and evaluation, (c) instruction, and (d) future opportunities.

Instrumentation

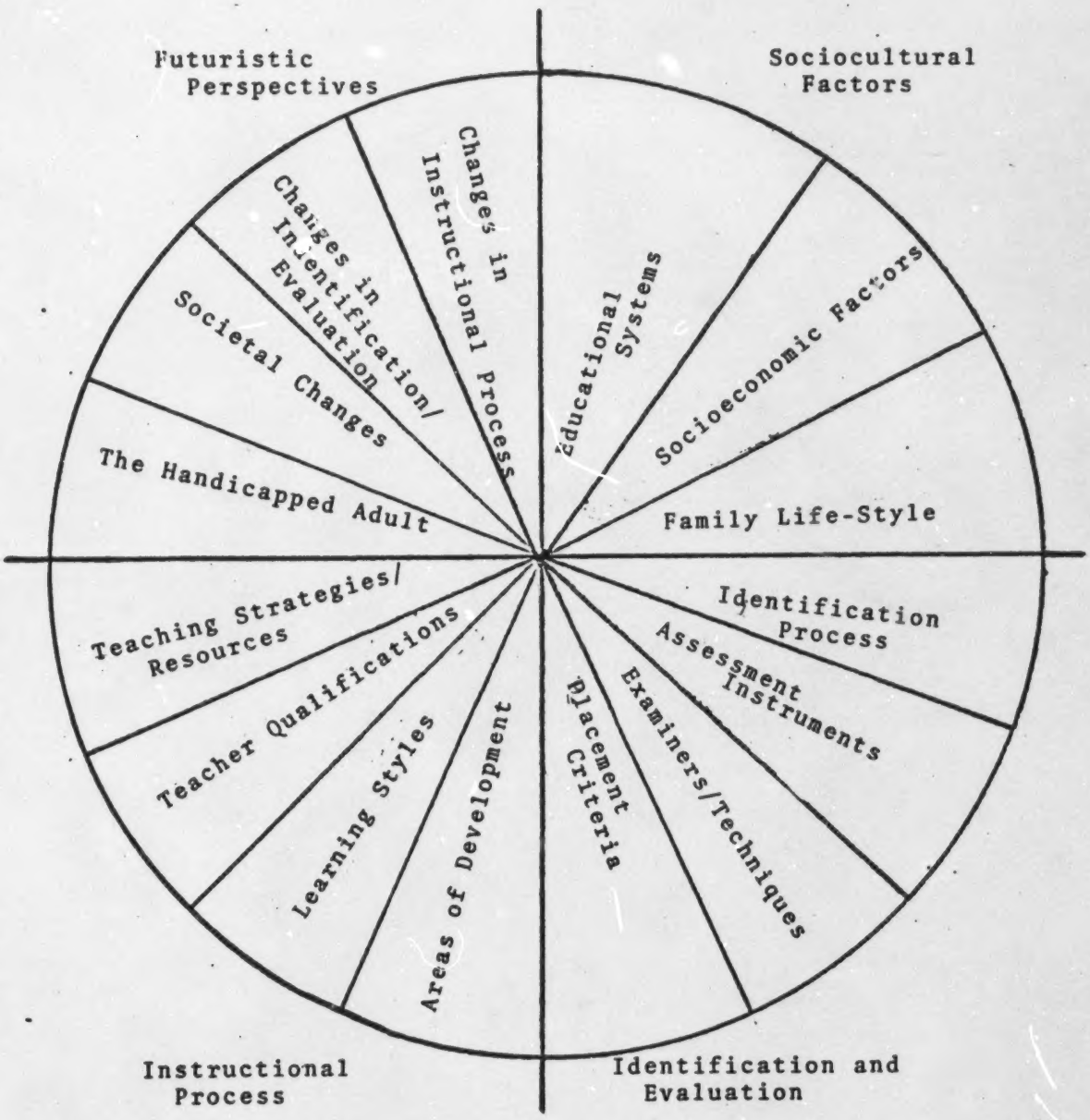
Based on research studies, other documents related to special education, and discussion with colleagues, a framework was conceptualized for considering problems and needs in educating minority handicapped children (see Figure 1). The Framework, depicted in circular form, consisted of four major components: (a) sociocultural factors or what might be considered the "roots" of cultural diversity, (b) identification and evaluation, (c) instructional process, and (d) futuristic perspectives. Each major component was divided into three or four subcomponents as presented in Figure I.

The framework provided the basis for development of a 32 item survey form. Careful consideration was given to formulation of items. In most cases each subcomponent in the framework generated two items for the instrument - one to impact on a possible problem concern and the other a need or status of performance in the area.

The 32 items were submitted to a 9-point Likert scale (Anderson, 1981). The numerical representations are 9-Very

Figure 1

A Framework for Considering Problems and Needs
in Educating the Minority Handicapped



Strongly Agree, 8-Strongly Agree, 7-Moderately Agree, 6-Mildly Agree, 5-Uncertain, 4-Mildly Disagree, 3-Moderately Disagree, 2-Strongly Disagree, and 1-Very Strongly Disagree.

Validation measures for the instrument included a thorough evaluation by colleagues in the field and a trial administration to a small number of special education majors. Based on information obtained through these methods, adjustments were made for items in terms of readability and structure in arriving at the final form of the instrument. (The instrument is available through the author.)

The survey form requested respondents to provide personal identification information and responses to the 32 items. Respondents were to indicate their classification, sex and years teaching experience. Directions for the 32 items were "Indicate by circling a corresponding number the extent to which you agree/disagree with the following statements."

Population

The survey form was administered to 40 special education majors enrolled in one or more special education courses at the upper undergraduate or graduate level. The administration of the survey covered a two-semester time period. In view of the classes in which the individuals were enrolled, it was felt that the respondents represented a cross-section of special education majors at the university which has a predominately Black student population.

Results

Tabulations from the personal identification section of the survey indicated that the respondents were (a) 17.5% upper undergraduate level and 82.5% graduate level in classification, (b) 2.5% male and 97.5% female, and (c) 22.5% without teaching experience and 77.5% with teaching experience - the average number of years being 8.0.

Group mean scores were computed for responses to each item and the results are reported in tables 1-4 by major component areas. In the sociocultural factors component (see Table 1), five of the group means for the six items were within the Mildly Agree scale reading. The item, "The social and economic status of minority families is very similar to that of whites" had a group mean of 3.38 which placed it within the Moderately Disagree scale reading.

In the area of identification and evaluation (see Table 2), three items (Children with handicapping conditions should be identified and evaluated for special education services, Personal and professional qualities of the examiner as well as the assessment techniques used influence a child's performance on standardized tests, and Children perform at different levels on criterion measures used for placement in special education) were rated as Moderately Agree. The other items in the area had a scale reading of Mildly Agree or Mildly Disagree.

A four point range in mean scores was observed for the area, instruction (see Table 3). "The extent to which teachers of handicapped children are trained to meet their academic,

Table 1

Mean Score and Scale Reading for Ratings on Sociocultural Factors

Item	Mean Score	Scale Reading
Problems in school systems lead to larger number of minority children labeled as handicapped	6.69	Mildly Agree
American school systems are efficient	6.28	Mildly Agree
Conditions of the family are associated with handicapping conditions in children	6.78	Mildly Agree
Status of minority families is similiar to that of whites.	3.38	Moderately Disagree
Life-style of a family leads to a larger number of children labeled handicapped	6.54	Mildly Agree
The life-style of minorities is different to that of whites	6.68	Mildly Agree

Note. Items are written in more abbreviated form in the tables than on the survey instrument.

Table 2

Mean Score and Scale Reading for Ratings on Identification and Evaluation

Item	Mean Score	Scale Reading
Children with handicapping conditions should be identified and evaluated for services	7.30	Moderately Agree
Black children who are handicapped are identified and referred for special education	6.30	Mildly Agree
Black children who are not handicapped are referred and placed in special education	6.33	Mildly Agree
Standardized instruments need to be used in evaluating children for special education	6.10	Mildly Agree
Presently used instruments are appropriate for Black children considered for special education	4.80	Mildly Disagree
Qualities of the examiner and assessment techniques used influence a child's performance on standardized tests.	7.72	Moderately Agree
Present examiners have essential qualities and use appropriate techniques in evaluating Black children for special education	4.41	Mildly Disagree
Children perform at different levels on criterion measures used for placement	7.69	Moderately Agree
Present criteria used to place Black children are based on multi-facet evaluation	4.68	Mildly Disagree

Table 3

Mean Score and Scale Reading for Ratings
Instructional Process

Item	Mean Score	Scale Reading
Individualized instruction influences development in cognitive, affective, and psychomotor areas	7.72	Moderately Agree
Black handicapped children receive instruction suited for their maximum development	5.90	Uncertain
Handicapped children of various ethnic groups have unique learning styles that merit special attention	7.79	Moderately Agree
Instruction for Black handicapped children is suited for their learning styles	4.41	Mildly Disagree
The extent to which teachers are trained influences student's success in school	8.05	Strongly Agree
Black handicapped children have teachers qualified to meet their needs	5.97	Uncertain
Black handicapped children have teachers who are meeting their needs	5.69	Uncertain
The type teaching strategies and resources used influence learning among handicapped children	8.38	Strongly Agree
Appropriate strategies and resources are used with Black handicapped children	5.65	Uncertain

social, and emotional needs influences the students' success in school" and "The type teaching strategies and resources used will influence the amount of learning among handicapped children" were rated as Strongly Agree. Items on individualized instruction and learning styles received Moderately Agree readings. "Instruction for Black handicapped children is generally suited for their learning styles and preferences" was rated as Mildly Disagree. Other items in the area received Uncertain ratings.

In the last area, futuristic perspectives, Table 4 reveals that "Society's commitment to further education and employment of the handicapped will influence the quality of life for handicapped individuals in the future" obtained a Moderately Agree rating. "Handicapped minority children face a promising future of productive employment and social living" received a rating of Mildly Disagree. Other items in the area were rated as either Mildly Agree or Uncertain.

Discussion

The mandate to educate all handicapped children presented educators, especially special educators with a challenge. To ease frustration and pave the way for success, explicit provisions were established for implementation of the mandate.

Within the handicapped population is a sizable group of minority individuals. And though major strides have been made in the implementation of the Education of All handicapped Children Act, concerns still exist regarding the appropriateness of

Table 4

Mean Score and Scale Reading for Ratings on Futuristic Perspectives

Item	Mean Score	Scale Reading
Society's commitment will influence handicapped individuals in the future	7.83	Moderately Agree
Handicapped minority children face a promising future in employment and social living	4.46	Mildly Disagree
Society will witness improvement in education, social and economic conditions, and family living	6.65	Mildly Agree
Minority handicapped children will comprise a percentage equal to that of theirs in the general population	5.67	Uncertain
Identification and evaluation of minority handicapped children will be on sound critera and by competent personnel	6.37	Mildly Agree
Minority children who are handicapped will be identified and evaluated on sound criteria by competent personnel	6.33	Mildly Agree
Instruction for minority handicapped children will be based on individual learning styles and by competent teachers with adequate resources	6.68	Mildly Agree
Minority handicapped children will receive an education that develops their potentials to the fullest	6.95	Mildly Agree

special education for minority handicapped individuals.

This paper focused on areas of concern that potentially impact on providing minority handicapped children an appropriate education. Following a review of related literature, a framework was presented for considering problems and needs in educating minority handicapped children. A survey form was designed to solicit teachers' perception of 32 items that delineated key variables associated with the four areas of the framework.

The findings were reported in terms of group means, depicting the extent to which the teachers Agreed/Disagreed with the items on a 9-point Likert scale. As the data in the tables are reviewed, the extent of agreement/disagreement is revealed, indicating the teachers' perceptions on each item. The discussion could focus on overall high versus low rating for items. But instead, attention will focus on discrepancy between corresponding items on the survey form. It is observable that discrepancy (using a difference of two or more readings on the scale as criterion, for example 4 to 6 or more) existed between a number of need/concern items and their comparison status of societal conditions/special education services for the minority handicapped item.

In the area of sociocultural factors, a discrepancy was observed between the perceived impact of socio/economic variables on handicapping conditions and existing social/economic status of minority families as compared with whites. Three discrepancies were observed in the identification and evaluation area which included (a) the need to use standardized tests for evaluation

and the appropriateness of present tests for Black children, (b) the influence of the examiner/assessment techniques on a child's performance and the appropriateness of present examiner qualities/testing techniques for Black children, and (c) the different levels of performance on criterion measures for placement by children and the suitability of present criteria used to place Black children in special education.

A discrepancy existed between each set of items in the instructional process area. They were (a) influence of individualized instruction and the suitability of instruciton for Blacks, (b) the merit of matching teaching-learning styles and the match of instruction to the learning styles of Blacks, (c) the influence of teacher training on students' success and the qualifications of teachers/quality of teaching for Blacks, and (d) the influence of teaching strategies/resources on learning and the appropriateness of teaching strategies/resources used with Black handicapped children. Only one discrepancy was observed in the futuristic perspective area and that was the influence of society's commitment to further education/employment of the handicapped and the future of minority handicapped children for productive employment/social living.

With each discrepancy cited above, the status of societal/special education services for the minority handicapped item had a lower mean score than its companion item which depicted a need for providing handicapped children an appropriate education. These findings have implications for all individuals

involved in the education of minority handicapped children, with special implications for providers of preservice and inservice teacher training. If findings in this study are tenable, the goal should be to raise the status of societal/special education services, as delineated in the framework, to a point comparable to the need that is appropriate for providing minority handicapped children a quality education. In essence, the reality of special education for minority handicapped children must equal to the promise of society's commitment to special education as mandated by the Education for All Handicapped Children Act.

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